8 Real Animals that Inspired the Design of the Xenomorph

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Dale Thomas December 20, 2020

Sometimes reality is just as terrifying as fiction

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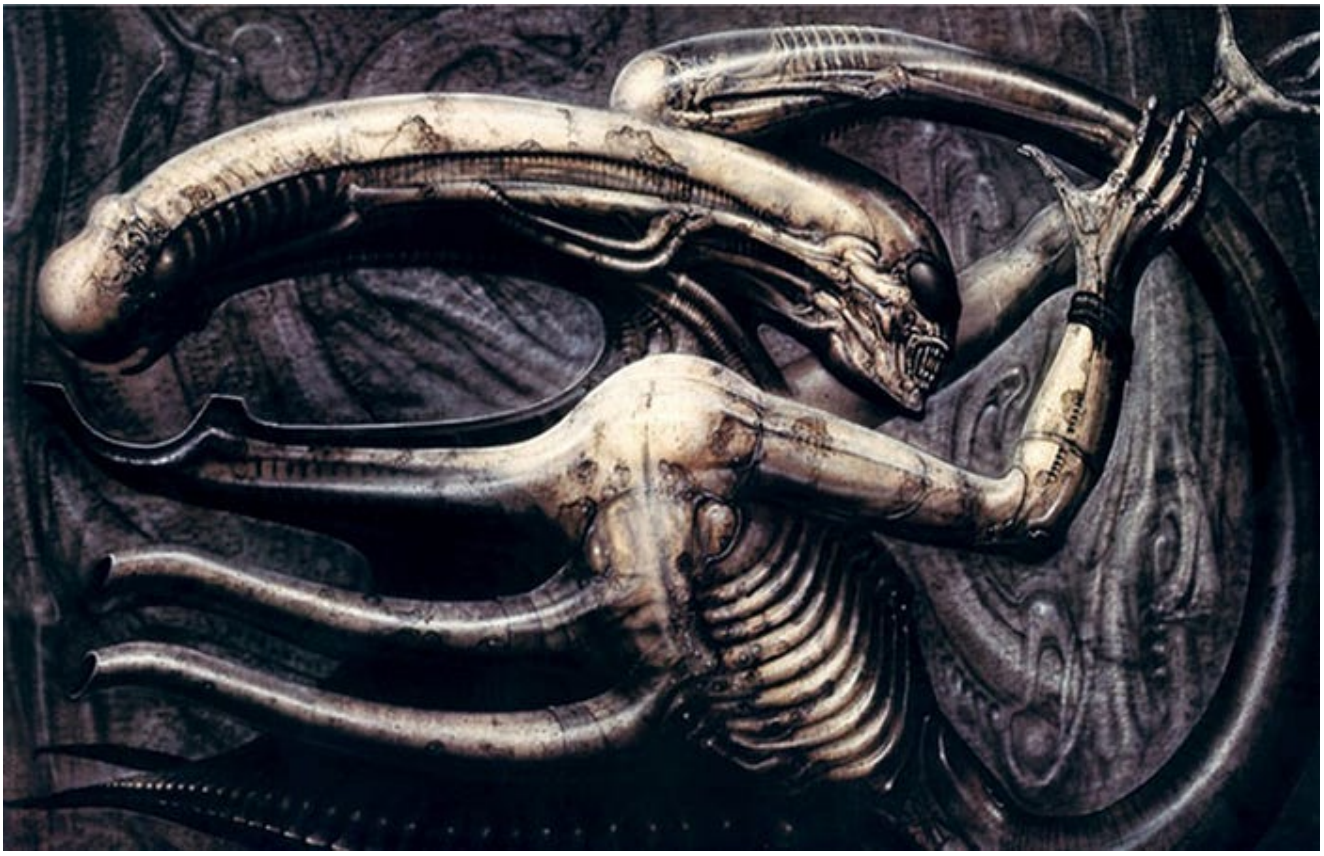
Alien: Covenant (2017)

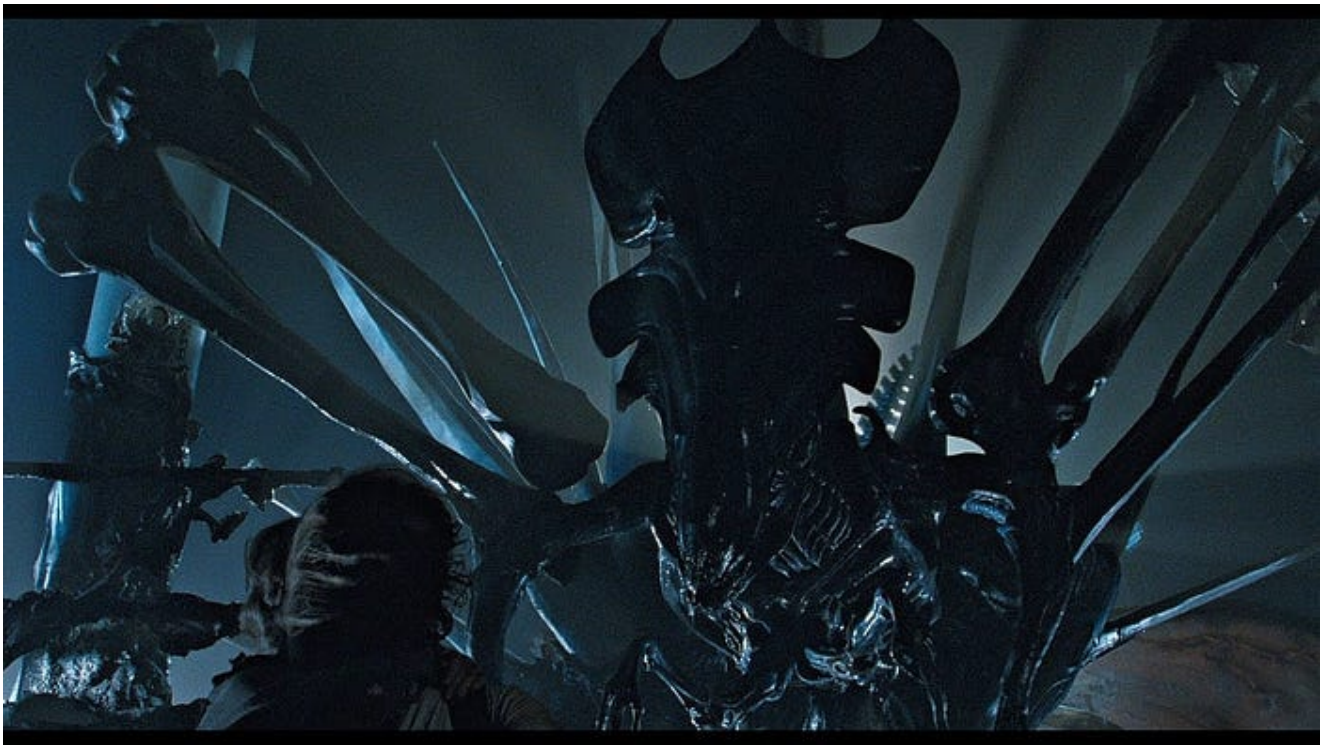
Ridley's Scott's 1979 science fiction horror movie "**Alien**" is a beloved sci-fi classic. A simple plot, gorgeous visuals, sympathetic characters, and a very memorable creature design.

Swiss artist Hans Ruedi Giger was brought on board to design the monster. His style of art focusses on mixing cybernetic technology with sexually provocative organic forms.



Necronom IV — H.R. Giger (1976)

In 1986, James Cameron made a phenomenally good sequel with “**Aliens**”, which expanded the Xenomorph lore and introduced the Alien queen.



Aliens (1986)

There have been several more movies based on the franchise, including two Predator crossover films, each of which brings something new to the aliens.

In this article, we will look at some real animals that inspired the design and life cycle of the xenomorphs. We'll look at one particular aspect of the organism and see how it was used to create one of the most terrifying monsters in all of cinema.

1. Sphex Wasp

This wasp immobilises its prey and lays its eggs inside. When they hatch, the larvae eat their way out while their host is still alive. *shiver*

Parasitic young bursting out of immobilised host— Aliens (1986)

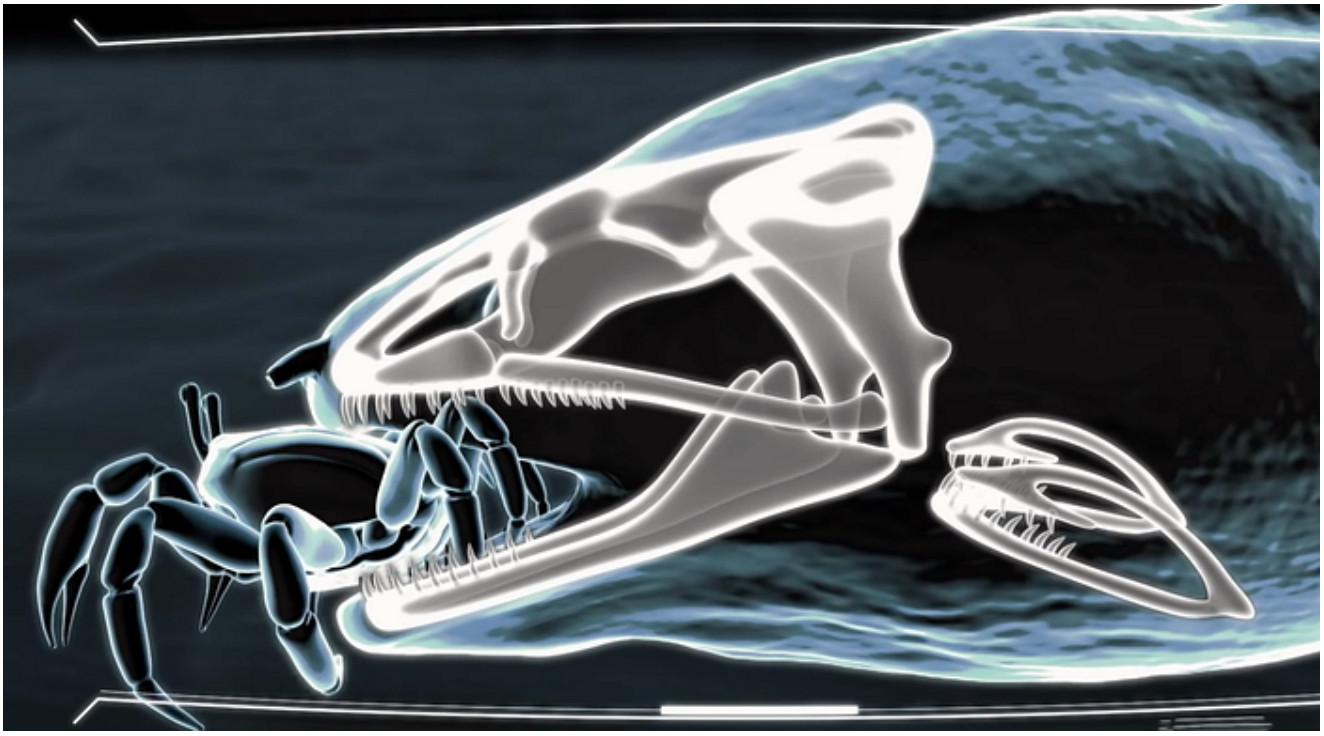
2. Bombardier Beetle

When attacked, this member of the Coleoptera order squirts a couple of chemicals out of its rear which react upon contact to form a noxious and boiling liquid. Not technically an acid, but a great defence mechanism.

Acid for blood. You don’t dare kill it — Alien (1979)

3. Moray Eel

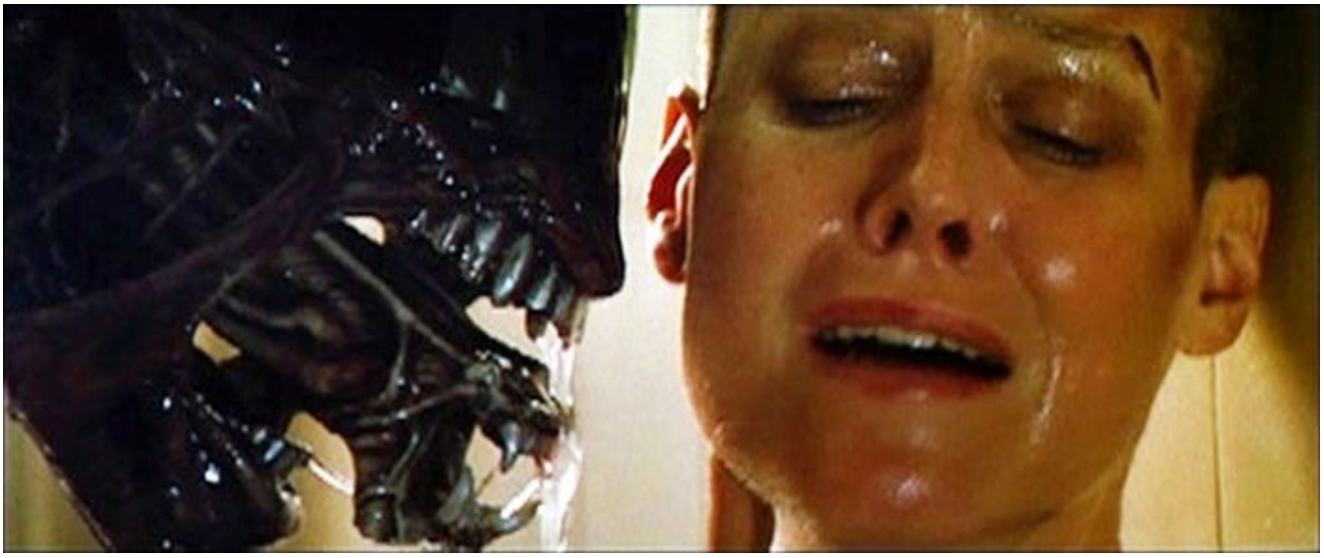
These fish have a second set of jaws inside their mouths that helps them pull prey inside.



Two sets of jaws — Alien (1979)

4. Dragonfly Larva

The juveniles feast on things likesmall fish and tadpoles, that they catch with an extensible jaw that lunges outwards at lightning speed.



Inner jaws are extensible — Alien 3 (1992)

5. Scorpion

These members of the arachnid family use their tails as weapons. They have a stinger with which to impale and stun their prey.

Queen alien stinger — Aliens (1986)

6. Sea spider

These giant arachnids live in the frigid waters off Antarctica. I certainly wouldn’t want one of those wrapped around my head, penetrating my mouth with a wriggly ovipositor.

Facehugger — Alien (1979)

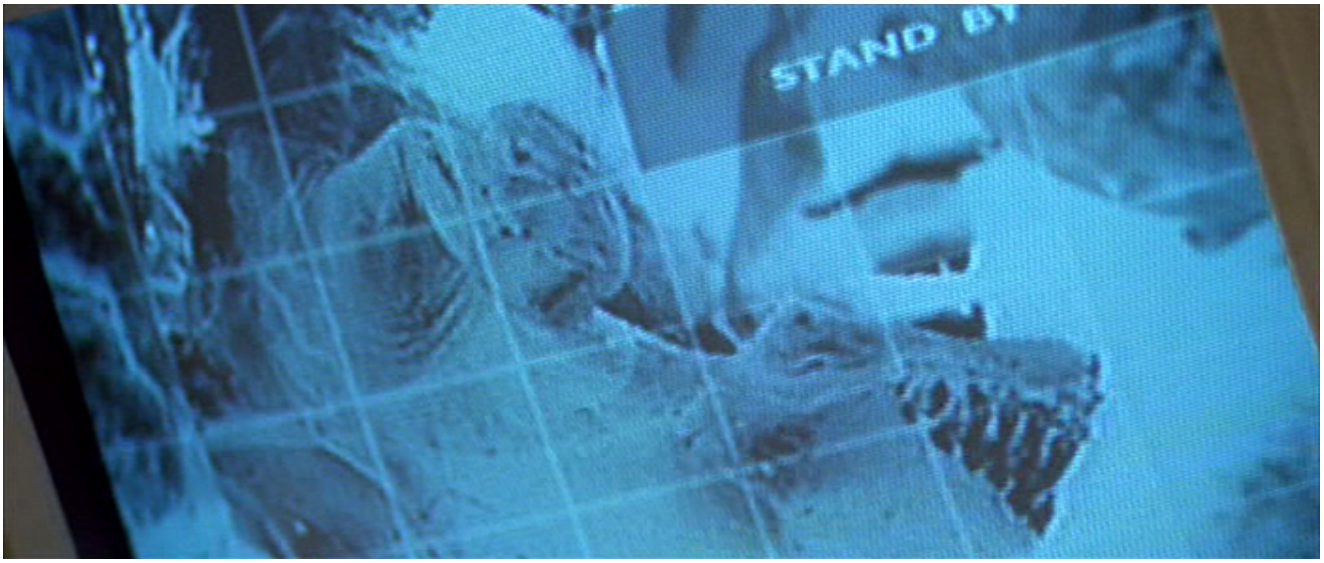
7. Cicada

These are arthropods, and therefore have their skeleton on the outside, called an exoskeleton, made of tough but flexible chitin. In order to grow, they must regularly shed their skin, leaving behind a dry husk.

The Alien husk — Alien 3 (1992)

8. Phronima

These crustaceans may be small and live in the open water of the oceans, but they are still terrifying. They live inside the hollowed out bodies of barrel-shaped *salps,* where they lay their many eggs. Yuck!



A queen alien inside a human — Alien 3 (1992)

Eight disgusting creatures that inspired the design of the xenomorph, which has terrified audiences for nearly forty years. Our world is filled with horrific parasites and predators with a wide range of hunting, feasting, and breeding strategies. If you’re a writer or artist looking for inspiration for the next nightmarish creature design, just pick up a book on arthropods.